

Critical Interventions on Statebuilding

International Statebuilding: The Rise of Post-Liberal Governance by David Chandler. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010. Pp. x + 195 + bibliography + index. £22.99 (pbk). ISBN 978-0-415-42118-8.

Regulating Statehood: State Building and the Transformation of the Global Order by Shahar Hameiri. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. Pp. xii + 214 + notes + bibliography + index. £57.70 (hbk). ISBN 978-0-230-25186-1.

The age of humanitarian intervention seems well and truly over: all contemporary interventions are essentially statebuilding interventions (SBIs). The remarkable expansion in this international practice has generated a vast scholarly literature. Most of this work is of the 'lessons learned' variety: it asks why SBIs have failed to live up to their promises and proposes amendments. However, there is also a lively and growing critical literature which sees it as part of a 'liberal peace project' or an exercise in biopolitics. Two new books on the topic offer very different – and arguably more fundamental – critical analyses, and are indispensable contributions to this growing literature.

David Chandler's *International Statebuilding* departs from the usual pattern of criticising the effects of SBIs, instead asking a more radical question: what is the problem to which statebuilding is thought to be the solution? What understanding of 'weak' or 'failed' states are we operating with that makes statebuilding appear as a possible, indeed, necessary response? Chandler argues that 'autonomy appears to be the problem which requires management'. That is, people in target states are thought to lack the 'capacity' to make sound political choices by themselves; intervention is required to build institutions, civil society, etc, to enable people to use their 'autonomy safely and unproblematically' (2010: 3). Within this paradigm, sovereignty no longer impedes intervention but necessitates it, because it implies an autonomous political space in which people may make the wrong decisions without appropriate 'capacity-building' (2010: 45). Statebuilding reconfigures sovereignty from a right of non-intervention, expressing the autonomous self-determination of a political community, into a variable of technical-administrative capacity to manage autonomy in a responsible fashion (2010: ch. 3). Similarly, as Chandler shows in a devastating case study of European Union intervention in Bosnia, democratisation processes in SBIs are not implemented to liberate people to make their own decisions, but to create constraints to govern the future exercise of agency and prevent the recurrence of conflict (2010: ch. 5).

Chandler argues that this paradigm does not, contrary to most of the existing literature, suggest that statebuilding is 'too liberal' – quite the reverse (2010: ch. 2). This critique is common to both problem-solving and critical scholars: Roland Paris, for example, criticises SBIs as overly liberal when prioritising democratisation over institutionalisation; Oliver Richmond identifies statebuilding as part of the 'liberal peace project'. But, Chandler argues, classical liberalism starts with the assumption that individual autonomy is a good thing. Liberals view democratisation and self-determination as unleashing freedom and autonomy, not as involving the creation of new institutional constraints on them. Chandler's central challenge is thus that the idea at the heart of statebuilding – that autonomy needs managing – is actually a fundamentally illiberal one: it is a form of *post*-liberal governance. Because the 'too

liberal' critique is so common the literature, this challenge demands a response from most quarters and is thus sure to stimulate productive debate. Chandler's attempts to read the post-liberal paradigm across other forms of intervention, particularly development economics and civil society-building, should also provoke arguments with specialists in those subfields, as he doubtless intended.

Indeed, there is plenty for critics to get their teeth into. Two problems stand out. The first is that, following Foucault, Chandler conceptualises post-liberal governance as essentially content-free and non-goal-driven; it is merely 'a continual process of relationship management' (2010: 72). Consequently, he essentially ignores the specific *content* of SBIs. In what precise way is autonomy being governed? Who benefits and who loses? Chandler offers no answers. Critics will emphasise that SBIs typically erect state institutions on the basis of neoliberal economic ideology. They may have an illiberal starting point but, consistent with arguments about the 'liberal peace project', their end goal is to construct a neoliberal order populated by rational, utility-maximising individuals – *homo economicus*.

Second, and related to this, although Chandler will maintain that this project assumes autonomy must be governed, arguably *every* social order involves the (re)production and management of *specific forms* of individual agency. Chandler critiques institutionalist, constructivist, and other approaches that emphasise how agency is either shaped by institutional incentives or is socially, politically and economically produced and constrained (2010: 74-84). But this leaves him implicitly defending the view that full, unproblematic autonomy is an irreducible human attribute, present in the state of nature before the social contract – a view Chandler himself describes as 'mythology' (2010: 74, 92). This asocial conception of autonomy is a fundamentally *normative* one which emerged only with the social-material processes associated with capitalism.¹ Even then, this individualistic ethic did not take hold automatically: it had to be instilled through various mechanisms – the marketplace, education, etc. Liberal societies have thus always tried to govern populations by producing a certain *sort* of autonomy while mythologizing-rationalizing it as pre-social. Post-liberal governance may be even more problematic than the liberal myth, but it is not necessarily best criticised by harking back to an ahistorical and asocial conception of human autonomy.

Shahar Hameiri's brilliant first book, *Regulating Statehood*, presents a rather more ruthless, forward-facing analysis of contemporary statebuilding, explicitly rejecting Chandler's 'nostalgia' for earlier forms of sovereign statehood (2010: 209). Hameiri also eschews the usual attempt to evaluate SBIs in terms of whether they are successful in building states, arguing that this can only involve benchmarking outcomes against a fictional, ideal-typical view of what states should look like (2010: ch.1). Instead, he asks a far more pertinent question: what form of statehood are contemporary SBIs actually producing? His compelling answer is: transnationalised, regulatory statehood. SBIs are conceptualised as 'multi-level regimes', operating to transform target states from within by establishing dominant 'regulatory' bodies within transnational spaces inside or near governing apparatuses, which then set the rules and goals for the rest of the state (2010: ch. 3). These non-majoritarian institutions are thus insulated from their own societies, but heavily penetrated by international agencies and their neoliberal agendas. SBIs are thus not simply trying to 'build' states as we classically understand them, but to 'regulate statehood', that is, to fundamentally transform the nature of target states. This highly sophisticated analysis is borne out well in fascinating case studies on the Solomon Islands and Cambodia.

Hameiri explicitly concurs with Chandler on a number of core issues, underlining the ‘anti-political’ nature of SBIs, and emphasising that statebuilding does not express an ‘all-powerful and disciplinary global liberalism’, but the continued centrality of state-based forms of regulation (2010: 40, 33, 28). The differences between these authors, however, are more significant. In particular, Hameiri’s treatment of SBIs is grounded in a coherent and powerful explanatory framework and strong, detailed case studies. Unlike Chandler, Hameiri contends that ‘regulating statehood’ is driven by substantive goals: the management of supposed security ‘risks’ thought to arise from maladministration in developing countries, and the installation of market-friendly governance (2010: ch. 3). Crucially, rather than trying to criticise this by defending a romanticised, liberal notion of sovereign statehood, Hameiri emphasises that states always involve power relations and that the task, therefore, is to explore how power is being redistributed by SBIs. Drawing on state theory and political geography, he carefully identifies ‘linkages between interveners and domestic social forces’, and traces the ‘social and political dynamics that shape the exercise of state power’ (2010: 33). With this powerful intellectual framework, Hameiri is thus able to explain the determinate content of SBIs, and how and why new forms of statehood are being produced, in a way that Chandler is not. The emphasis on social conflict shaping outcomes also helps us understand why SBIs so frequently diverge from plan, although this is not Hameiri’s primary focus.

Ideally, more attention should have been paid to explaining differences in outcome. In the Solomons, for instance, elites have been unable to resist external state-building efforts which have profoundly disrupted their traditional patronage systems (though money politics has largely been substituted instead). In Cambodia, however, elites have been able to combine an internationally-driven state-building agenda with existing patronage networks to further demobilise and exclude the opposition from political participation. Hameiri neglects analysing this discrepancy, suggesting only belatedly that Cambodian elites were better able to dominate the key regulatory institution which set the terms for the SBI – in this case, a donor-government interface body – and thus twist it to their ends (2010: 212). This merely raises the question of how they were able to do so.

Finally, Hameiri demonstrates that SBIs are not simply isolated operations in far-away lands, but have major relevance for governance in intervening states themselves, and for international order more generally. He shows, for instance, how the transformation of the Australian Federal Police from a small domestic police force into an agent of international statebuilding in the Solomons, Papua New Guinea and elsewhere has involved the reshaping of the Australian state (2010: ch. 5). The apogee of this is the ongoing domestic operation in the Northern Territories designed to forcibly restructure aboriginal communities, which is explicitly described by the government as an ‘intervention’, illustrating the way in which the internal/external distinction is blurring in intervening as well as target societies. *Regulating Statehood* is a path-breaking, important and intellectually stimulating book, which ought to be issued quickly in paperback to facilitate a wide readership. As with Chandler’s work, the book speaks to themes well beyond the statebuilding subfield, and will doubtless stimulate debate and future scholarship.

Lee Jones is Lecturer in International Politics at Queen Mary, University of London

¹ C.B. MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: From Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962).